



# Company Command

## Building Combat-Ready Teams



**To:** Company Commanders Headed to Afghanistan

**From:** Company Commanders in Afghanistan

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## Partnering with Afghan National Security Forces

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The guidance from Higher is clear: We have been charged to think and act differently about the way we are waging the COIN fight in Afghanistan. Our mission is to embrace the Afghan people, partner with ANSF, build governance capacity and accountability, and get better every day. Although many of us have been fighting this way for years, now all of us have the mission to transform the war, and we don't have much time. Our main effort, paradoxically, is to become the supporting effort to effective Afghan national security forces.

This is new terrain, and we are learning as we go. Whereas we used to conduct missions with Afghan forces, now we are living, eating, sleeping, training, planning and fighting alongside them. Whereas we used to mentor them, now we have the Soldiers on hand to teach them (and learn from them) by our example, 24/7. You may wonder how this is currently playing out at the company level. Here, we share some of our experiences so far, hoping you'll find them worthwhile for your own unit's preparations.

### CPT Shilo Crane

CDR, B/1-121 IN, 48th IN BDE, GA ARNG

Task Force Geronimo (1-501 PIR), RC-East

A couple of weeks ago, I received the order for the new partnership program. My company is now partnered with 4-2 Kandak, which is an ANA combat-support battalion with an HHC, an artillery battery, a recon company and an engineer company. We're working towards complete partnership at all levels. I've assigned one of my platoons to each company, and every one of my Soldiers is assigned to sponsor one to three Afghan soldiers in all their day-to-day activities. Now, instead of 15 high-ranking Americans mentoring an ANA battalion's staff, we have 103 Soldiers of every rank partnering with our ANA counterparts.

One of the first things we did was go through the FOB and take down anything that distinguishes between U.S. and ANA soldiers—anything that said “American only.” We're changing the TOC sign to read “B/1-121 IN and 4-2 Kandak.” We're putting photos of both chains of command up on the walls. Their S-2 now sits with our S-2, so the ANA don't feel like we're hiding any intel. Their operations officer now works alongside ours, so they see and know everything we know. Our Joes have been able to teach their Joes processes—rehearsals, PCCs, PMCS—that are already paying big dividends. Their colonel is ecstatic. I don't consider myself his mentor. I told him, “You're a colonel, I'm a captain. I'm not here to mentor you. I know that you know how to fight and kill the enemy. I am here to provide you enablers and to share with you some processes that work for my unit and the U.S. Army.” We are working together very effectively.

Under the old way of operating, we would link up with ANSF only for operations. We'd say, “Give me X number of ANA forces,” just to put an “Afghan face” on an operation. Now we are together all the time, from receipt of mission through recovery. This constant interaction puts a greater burden on cultural awareness. The “dirty Afghan” mind-set



Photographs by LTC Pete Kilner

*As commander of Company B, 1st Battalion, 121st Infantry (Light), Georgia Army National Guard, CPT Shilo Crane has partnered and colocated his company with an Afghan National Army battalion at Forward Operating Base Rushmore in Paktika Province.*

has to go. The Afghans will fight, and they are not stupid, but they also do not have the experience and training that we take for granted. So, for example, when an ANA soldier puts an 1151 into reverse in order to stop it, or when they don't know what a chem light is, it's not because they are stupid—it's because they've never been taught. It's no different from someone putting me in a space shuttle and telling me to fly it, and then laughing at me because I didn't know how. It's not that I'm stupid; it's just that I was never taught how.

When we step back and take the time to train the ANA how to use equipment, they perform well and love it. I sign out NODs to the ANA. They sign for them, do PMCS, use them properly—and now they're not bumbling around in the dark trying to keep up with my Soldiers. The same with vehicles: One of the ANA leaders mentioned that it's easy for Americans to be brave when we are driving in MRAPs down Tier-1 IED routes while the ANA are piled into the beds of unarmored Ford Ranger pickup trucks. Since U.S. forces are not allowed to roll out the gate in anything but MRAPs, we had some 1151s we weren't using. We trained the ANA on maintenance, PMCS and driver training—using our POI—and now they roll in up-armored Humvees, which at least provide them some of the protection that we enjoy. This has increased our bond. We're now on more equal footing. Of course, now we have to make sure that we don't teach them some of our bad habits of focusing too much on force protection. We try to dismount and get on the ground with the civilian populace as much as possible.

It's great that we learn how to eat and not to touch things with our left hands, but the Afghans really are not so sensitive about that stuff. They just want to be treated like equals and like fellow human beings, like fellow soldiers. That's where you're going to “make your money” here.



*CPT Dennis Williams' cavalry troop is operating “shoulder to shoulder” with Afghan police and soldiers high in the mountains of western Afghanistan.*

## **CPT Dennis Williams**

**CDR, Team Apocalypse (A/4-73 CAV)**

**Task Force Professionals (2-321 AFAR), RC-West**

Our long-term mission is to partner with the Afghan national police in order to secure the local populace. Currently, my troop is working alongside the ANSF to secure Sabzek Pass, which is the key terrain along Highway 1 that links Herat Province and Badghis Province. This portion of Hwy 1 is the only route that commercial traffic can take between the provinces, and it is the only portion of the ring road that still isn't paved. We are helping the ANA and ANP to secure the pass so that the road can be paved. A secure, navigable Sabzek Pass will be a huge boon to economic development in Badghis Province.

The insurgents in this area are criminal elements—thugs—who until recently controlled the pass. All commercial traffic and ANSF were vulnerable to them. Spanish ISAF forces and the ANA cleared the pass, and now we are working with the ANSF to develop their capacity to permanently control the pass themselves. Working shoulder to shoulder with our Afghan counterparts, Team Apocalypse has established a screen line, dominating the key terrain along the pass.

Ours is a combat-advisory mission. Historically, combat advisors to the ANSF have been a bunch of senior NCOs and company-grade and field-grade officers who mentored the Afghans at the staff level. Our model is more of a real partnership. I work with my company-level ANA counterpart, and our Soldiers are partnered with ANA soldiers and ANP. By living with them, eating with them, sleeping right next to them and going out on missions with them, our paratroopers are making a statement about the commitment of the U.S. government. We are sharing the same risks, enduring the same “suck.” We are able to show them, by our example, how a professional army operates.

Every day I am with the ANA commander in Sabzek Pass—planning, engaging with the populace, collaborating on intelligence. He always wants to share dinner with me, so I go over there and eat dinner with him most nights of the week. It's a great experience. One day it didn't work out so well. Out comes dinner, and it's goat and rice and some naan bread. They pass a bone to me, a goat leg, I think, and it barely has any meat on it. But to them it's the choice cut, so they insist I eat it. As soon as I bite into it, I can tell that the meat is not cooked through, but I also know that it is important that I honor their generosity. Well, for the next few days, let's just say I was making constant trips to the outhouse. My paratroopers got a good laugh out of it; I chalk it up as the price of really partnering with the local people.

The ANA are very motivated fighters. The people of Afghanistan have been at war for 30 years, so the ANA soldiers typically have as much—if not more—combat experience than our Soldiers. Their biggest challenge, however, is planning and preparing for long-term operations—specifically, logistics. Logistics is not a primary concern for their leaders when they plan combat operations, so it becomes

## Company Command Glossary of Terms

**1151**—M1151 up-armored Humvee.

**120s and 81s**—120 mm and 81 mm mortar tubes, respectively.

**AIT**—Advanced individual training.

**ANA**—Afghan National Army.

**ANP**—Afghan national police.

**ANSF**—Afghan national security forces.

**CAS**—Close air support (Air Force).

**CCA**—Close combat attack (Army attack helicopter support).

**Chem light**—Chemical glow stick.

**COIN**—Counterinsurgency.

**FOB**—Forward operating base.

**IED**—Improvised explosive device.

**Intel**—Intelligence.

**ISAF**—International Security Assistance Force.

**JPEL**—ISAF's list of bad guys.

**Kandak**—Afghan battalion.

**MRAP**—Mine resistant ambush protected wheeled vehicle.

**NODs**—Night optical devices.

**OP**—Observation post.

**PCC**—Precombat check.

**PMCS**—Preventive maintenance, checks and services.

**POI**—Program of instruction.

**QRF**—Quick reaction force.

**RC**—Regional command.

**Tier-1 IED route**—A route with a high threat of improvised explosive devices.

**TOC**—Tactical operations center.

a limiting factor over time. U.S. sustainment is well thought-out and in place. When we moved into Sabzek Pass, the ANA were prepared to operate for only about two weeks, so we ended up sharing our MREs and fuel with them. Yes, at the higher level we want them to build their own capacity, but at the tactical level we want them to continue to operate, so sharing supplies is a necessity.

Paratroopers are amazingly resourceful. When we moved into the pass, we had minimal supplies. I told them, "We'll be here awhile, and it's gonna suck." The next thing I knew, they had dug 5-foot-deep holes, lined the floors with flat rocks, dug cutouts into the walls, taken cots and cut them in half and added wire—and had OP bunkers with built-in grills! The ANA soldiers will buy a local sheep, and, together, they enjoy a great dinner out on their OP.

This is a platoon leader's fight. Platoons are deploying independently into remote locations, and a platoon leader may be responsible for partnering with an entire district. A platoon leader might be the main person on the ground representing the U.S. government. Lieutenants must be critical thinkers and capable of making decisions without having to call back for guidance. They need to be able to interact with all kinds of people. They need to be genuine. People know when they are being respected and when someone is genuine. Afghans, especially, judge a man by his character, and they are great judges of character.

During my unit's predeployment training, we conducted a lot of live-fire exercises focused on urban fighting and room cleaning. As it turns out, we haven't had to do much of that. The best way to prepare for this fight would be to develop cultural understanding and language skills. Ultimately, language skills enable our Soldiers to interact with the populace and ANSF; however, it's really hard to train Stateside for that part of the mission. We don't have the capability to replicate personal interactions within a foreign culture, and it takes months of commitment to learn the language. Given the resources we realistically have Stateside, I would prepare to deploy here by focusing on the basics—

shoot, move, communicate—with an emphasis on getting Soldiers qualified on every weapons system they might touch over here.

### CPT Aron Hauquitz

CDR, Team Hurricane (HHB/2-321 FA)

Task Force Professionals, RC-West

I am an infantry officer who is commanding an HHB-plus, consisting of two infantry platoons, a mortar battery with four 120s and six 81s, an engineer squad, and the normal staff of a headquarters battery. One of the infantry platoons is completely partnered with the Afghan police of Guzara District; the Soldiers live at the district police headquarters and do everything with the police. The other in-



*CPT Aron Hauquitz, who is serving as both a commander and an advisor in Afghanistan, is on his second year-long deployment there in the past three years. It is his fourth combat deployment overall.*





*A partially constructed building on the site of an Afghan police station serves as the new home for a platoon of American soldiers who recently partnered with the police there.*

fantry platoon is partnered with the Afghan police's provincial QRF in Herat; that platoon is in the process of moving out there into downtown Herat, but they are already conducting joint operations daily. My mortars are split into three firing elements—at Bala Murghab, Moqor and here at Camp Stone. The engineer squad is running AIT to train the first-ever Afghan route-clearance company. The staff are doing their normal duties, and I am serving as advisor to the Afghan colonel who is the director of security in Herat Province.

Every success in Afghanistan is based on personal relationships. Here's a quick story of how the trust established through partnership led to a hugely successful operation. One day in October, my platoon leader who is living at the district police headquarters and who has developed a great rapport with the leadership there received a tip about the location of the #1 bad guy in RC-West. The platoon leader reported the information up the chain. The next morning, the ANP informed us that that individual was dead and that they were moving immediately to clear the area that had long been controlled by his illegal forces. My two infantry platoons moved out with their Afghan counterparts, and I linked up with the director of security.

U.S. forces here are required to move in MRAPs when mounted. When my Soldiers arrived at the main town to clear, the vehicles were too large to move through its streets. So we parked the MRAPs, guarded them and moved into town with the ANP. The Afghans led the way. They had the informants. They knew where the insurgents and caches were located. They conducted the cordons and searches. When they found something, my Soldiers moved in to assist with site exploitation. In one sense, we didn't do much; the Afghans led the way. Yet, to the Afghans, our presence there meant everything! With us there, they knew they had two platoons of American Infantry covering their back. With us there, they knew they had CAS, CCA and artillery if they needed it. With us there, they knew they had the world's best casualty evacuation and medical care. The Afghans can do things that we can't, and we can do things that they can't. Working together, we eliminated the #2 and #3 on the JPEL over the

next nine days of continuous joint operations, totally changing the security landscape in Herat Province.

On a cordon and search on Day 5 of the operation, Afghan and U.S. forces were partnered down to the squad level, one American squad per ANP platoon. The Afghan colonel I advise was maneuvering his units, and thus maneuvering American units. He'd never seen anything like it, and it has transformed our relationship. The ANP are beginning to understand that we truly are here to support them, not the other way around.

For those nine days, we operated side by side with the ANP on the largest, most successful operation here in a long time, maybe ever. Our Soldiers were shoulder to shoulder with the ANP. We slept on the same schoolhouse floor at night; we played soccer with them between missions during the day. My counterpart speaks decent English, so we were able to talk without an interpreter. He and I spent hours talking—about our families, about our dreams, about Afghanistan. In 2007–08, I spent a year in RC-West as an advisor to the ANP. I can say with confidence that my Soldiers and I developed a year's worth of trust with our Afghan partners in just that nine-day operation.

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Art by Jody Harmon

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